

Appl. No.: 09/882,834
Amdt. dated 02/18/2005
Reply to Office action of November 19, 2004

Amendments to the Claims:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for managing an inventory of at least one product of a supplier that is provided to at least one customer, wherein the at least one customer is capable of receiving and shipping out the at least one product, said method comprising:

creating an open purchase order comprising an acceptable inventory range bounded by a lower limit and an upper limit for each product that the supplier provides to the at least one customer;

storing a supply amount of the at least one product in a storage unit that is remote from the supplier and proximate to the customer;

maintaining a product inventory count for each product representative of the amount of the product that is maintained in inventory by the at least one customer, said maintaining comprising:

decreasing the product inventory count as the at least one customer ships out the respective product; and

increasing the product inventory count as the at least one customer receives additional amounts of the respective product, wherein the at least one customer receives the additional amounts from the supply amount stored in the storage unit; and

monitoring the product inventory count at a supplier location such that the supplier is capable of detecting when product inventory counts approach the respective lower limits, wherein the product inventory count approaches the respective lower limit when the product inventory count falls below a notification level between the lower limit and the upper limit, and wherein the supplier location is remote from the customer location.

wherein at least one of the creating, maintaining or monitoring steps is at least partially performed by a processing unit.

2. (Original) A method according to Claim 1 further comprising providing the respective customer with an additional amount of the respective product once the supplier has detected at least one product inventory count approaching the respective lower limit, wherein the additional amount is provided to the customer from the supply amount stored in the storage unit,

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wherein providing the additional amount occurs independent of a purchase order associated with the additional amount, and wherein the product inventory count is within the acceptable inventory range once the respective customer receives the additional amount.

3. (Original) A method according to Claim 1, wherein maintaining the product inventory count further comprises storing the product inventory count in an electronic file, and transferring the electronic file to the supplier location to facilitate monitoring the product inventory count at the supplier location, wherein monitoring the product inventory count comprises monitoring the electronic file.

4. (Original) A method according to Claim 3, wherein transferring the electronic file comprises transferring the electronic file over the World Wide Web, and wherein monitoring the product inventory count comprises monitoring a display of the product inventory count stored within the electronic file.

5. (Original) A method according to Claim 3, wherein storing the product inventory count in an electronic file comprises storing the product inventory count in an electronic file in an extensible markup language format.

6. (Original) A method according to Claim 1, wherein each product includes at least one electronic identifier, and wherein maintaining the product inventory count comprises:

reading each electronic identifier as the customer ships out the respective product and immediately thereafter decreasing the product inventory count by the number of products shipped out as identified by the electronic identifiers; and

reading each electronic identifier as the customer receives the respective product from the storage unit and immediately thereafter increasing the product inventory count by the number of products received as identified by the electronic identifiers.

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7. (Original) A method according to Claim 1 further comprising providing each customer with an initial amount of each product before maintaining the product inventory count, wherein the initial amount of each product is received by the at least one customer from the storage unit.

8. (Original) A method according to Claim 7, wherein each product includes at least one electronic identifier, and wherein providing each customer with the initial amount of each product further comprises reading each electronic identifier as the initial amount is received.

9. (Original) A method according to Claim 1, wherein the supply amount is bounded by the lower limit and the upper limit.

10. (Original) A method according to Claim 1, wherein the lower limit is one below the upper limit of the acceptable inventory range, wherein the notification level equals the lower limit, and wherein the at least one customer has at least one point-of-use location capable of receiving and shipping out each product.

11. (Original) A system for providing at least one product from a supplier to at least one remote customer, wherein the customer is capable of receiving and shipping out the at least one product, wherein the supplier and the at least one customer have an open purchase order comprising an acceptable inventory range bounded by a lower and an upper limit for each product that the supplier provides to the at least one customer, said system comprising:

a storage unit disposed remote from the supplier and proximate to the at least one customer, wherein a supply amount of the at least one product is stored in said storage unit, wherein the supplier provides the at least one product to the customer from the supply amount stored in the storage unit;

a first processing unit disposed proximate the at least one customer for maintaining a product inventory count for each product representative of the amount of the product that is maintained in inventory by the respective customer, wherein the product inventory count is

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decreased as the customer ships out each product, and wherein the product inventory count is increased as the customer receives additional amounts of each product; and

a second processing unit disposed proximate the supplier, wherein at least one of the supplier and said second processing unit is capable of monitoring the product inventory count such that at least one of the supplier and said second processing unit is capable of detecting product inventory counts that approach the respective lower limit, wherein the product inventory count approaches the respective lower limit when the product inventory count falls below a notification level between the lower limit and the upper limit.

12. (Original) A system according to Claim 11, wherein said second processing unit is further capable of sending a shipment request to the supplier when at least one of the supplier and said second processing unit has detected at least one product inventory count approaching the respective lower limit, wherein when the supplier receives the shipment request the supplier is capable of providing the respective customer with an additional amount of the respective product, wherein the supplier provides the additional amount independent of a purchase order associated with the additional amount, and wherein the product inventory count is within the acceptable inventory range once the additional amount is received.

13. (Original) A system according to Claim 11, wherein said first processing unit is capable of storing the product inventory count in an electronic file, wherein said first processing unit is capable of transferring the electronic file, wherein said second processing unit is capable of receiving the electronic file, and wherein said second processing unit monitors the electronic file.

14. (Original) A system according to Claim 13, wherein said first processing unit is capable of transferring the electronic file over the World Wide Web, and wherein said second processing monitors a display of the product inventory count stored within the electronic file.

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15. (Original) A system according to Claim 13, wherein said first processing unit stores the product inventory count in an electronic file in an extensible markup language format.

16. (Original) A system according to Claim 11, wherein each product includes at least one electronic identifier, wherein said first processing unit reads each electronic identifier as the customer ships out the respective product and immediately thereafter decreases the product inventory count by the number of products shipped out as identified by the electronic identifiers, and wherein said first processing unit reads each electronic identifier as the customer receives the respective product and immediately thereafter increases the product inventory count by the number of products received as identified by the electronic identifiers.

17. (Original) A system according to Claim 11, wherein said first processing unit is further capable of storing a product inventory count associated with an initial amount of the at least one product before maintaining the product inventory count, wherein said first processing unit stores the initial amount as the at least one customer receives the initial amount from the storage unit.

18. (Original) A system according to Claim 17, wherein each product includes at least one electronic identifier, wherein said first processing unit is capable of reading each electronic identifier as the initial amount of the at least one product is received by the customer, wherein said first processing unit stores the product inventory count associated with the initial amount according to the number of products received as identified by the electronic identifiers.

19. (Original) A system according to Claim 11, wherein the supply amount is bounded by the lower limit and the upper limit.

20. (Original) A system according to Claim 11, wherein the lower limit is one below the upper limit of the acceptable inventory range, wherein the notification level equals the lower limit, and wherein the supplier has a point-of-use location capable of receiving and shipping out

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the at least one product, and wherein the supplier provides the at least one product to the customer at the at least one point-of-use location.

Claims 21 – 58 (Cancelled).